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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine the extent of the perceived communication and support linkages between high school principals and vocational agriculture teachers in the state of Indiana. A survey questionnaire using a Likert-type scale was mailed to all vocational agricultural teachers and their respective high school administrators in the state. Statistically significant differences were found in the perceptions of principals and vocational agriculture teachers regarding the following items: free exchange of information, student feedback, confidence in each other, assistance with professional problems, team work, and accountability of time and resources. A large number of teachers in this study had limited formal contact time with school administrators for supervision or observation of instruction. Results suggest that communication linkages are not well established between vocational agriculture teachers and school principals in Indiana. References are included, along with illustrative charts and tables.(Author/TE)

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by

Robert A. Martin

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Supervisory Communications and
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-Abstract-

The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent of the perceived communication and support linkages between high school principals and vocational agriculture teachers.

There were statistically significant differences (.05) in the perceptions of principals and teachers on the following items: free exchange of information, student feedback, confidence in each other, assistance with professional problems, team work, and accountability of time and resources. A large number of teachers in this study had limited formal contact time with school administrators regarding supervision or observation of instruction.

The results of this study suggest that communication linkages are not well established between vocational agriculture teachers and school principals in this state.

SUPERVISORY COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPORT LINKAGES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

According to Finch and McGough (1982), the only way an organization can be successful is through communication. In the case of educational organizations, the actions of administrators, faculty, and staff must pass through various communications channels. Barriers are inevitably being erected to impede communication. The results are misunderstanding, insecurity, conflict and/or lack of motivation. According to Davis (1982), if barriers are substantially removed, people not only can but will work together.

Miles (1965) in analyzing healthy organizations states that in a healthy organization, there is relatively distortion-free communication vertically and horizontally. People have the information they need and have gotten it without exerting undue efforts....(pp. 18).

Lucio & McNeil (1979) found that....teachers whose wants and needs are in agreement with their principal's expectations express significantly higher job satisfaction than teachers whose wants are in conflict with the principal's definition of the teacher's role. There is often wide disparity between what the principal says is expected of teachers and what the teachers think the principal expects of them (pp. 30).

Studies conducted by Argyris (1962) suggest that sound decision making depends on informal interpersonal relationships (more than on formal structure) based on the following factors: genuineness, descriptive nonevaluative feedback, sensitivity, and rationality.

The demand for accountability and evaluation, various modes of supervision, declining enrollments, and changing student needs all contribute to establishing barriers to communication. How do schools foster communication linkages? Whose responsibility is it to take the initiative for establishing communication linkages? What part does communication play in the supervision of teachers and teaching?

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent of the perceived communication linkages between school principals and vocational agriculture teachers. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To compare the perceptions concerning communications and support between high school principals and vocational agriculture teachers.

2. To identify the extent of the formal and informal supervision contact time between high school principals and vocational agriculture teachers.

PROCEDURES

The descriptive method of research using a questionnaire with a Likert-type scale was used to gather data for this study. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on a review of the literature. The instrument was validated through a review by selected vocational agriculture teachers. Revisions were made based on the review, and the final instrument was prepared for distribution.

The survey form consisted of 30 questions. The instrument was mailed to all vocational agriculture teachers (256) and their respective high school administrators (227) in the state of Indiana during the summer of 1983. After three weeks, follow-up letters were sent and telephone calls were made to 10 percent of those not responding, to note any differences in the groups - non-respondents to respondents. There were no unusual characteristics about the non-respondents. There was an overall 77 percent response rate.

Respondents were asked to complete 23 questions regarding their perceptions of the communication linkages in their schools using a five point Likert-scale. The scale consisted of numerical values as follows: 1-none; 2-very little; 3-some; 4-considerable; 5-very great. Respondents were also asked to complete seven questions, in a multiple choice format, regarding contractual and supervisory matters in their schools. The Cronbach-alpha reliability for the survey instrument was calculated to be (0.91). The data were analyzed using means, standard deviations, t-tests, and frequencies.

FINDINGS

Chart No. 1 indicates that over 10 percent of the teachers in this study had no formal observation of instruction. Nearly 38 percent of the respondents had two observations and over 35 percent had at least one observation. Few teachers had three or four observations, but nearly 10 percent of the teachers had five observations.

Chart No. 2 indicates that over 35 percent of the teachers had conferences with their principals. However, over 12 percent of the teachers had no conferences with their respective principals. Over ten percent of the teachers reported having five or more teacher/principal conferences. Slightly over 11 percent had 3 conferences. Twenty-six percent had two conferences. Four teacher/principal conferences were relatively small in number (4.8 percent).

Openness and Receptiveness

Table 1 indicates that there were significant differences at the .05 level in the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding all four items on this subscale - principal-teacher talk, student-teacher talk, friendliness and support, and approachability. Principals generally indicated that it was their perception that there was more one-to-one communication than did teachers; however, teachers indicated more one-to-one communication on the part of teachers and students regarding school matters.

Team Work

Table 2 indicates there were significant differences at the .05 level in the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding team building in their schools. Overall, principals perceive there is more confidence building and team work occurring in their schools than was indicated by teachers.

Problem-Solving

Table 3 indicates that there was not a significant difference at the .05 level in the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the principal's thoroughness in explaining school procedures. However, the principals perceive helpfulness provided among teachers and candid and useful information provided by the administration to teachers to be greater than what teachers perceive it to be.

Program Development

Table 4 indicates that there was no significant difference at the .05 level in the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the use of community resources. However, there were significant differences between the respondent groups regarding the usefulness of information, teacher independence, and discussions regarding program goals and objectives. The teachers apparently perceive that they have more independence than principals believe they have.

CONCLUSIONS

There were statistically significant differences (at the .05 level) in the perceptions of principals and teachers on the following items: free exchange of information, student feedback, confidence in each other, assistance with professional problems, team work, and accountability of time and resources.

An alarming number of teachers in this study have limited formal contact time with school administrators regarding supervision or observation of instruction. There appears to be no systematic procedure for planned sustained communication as far as the teachers and school administrators are concerned in the schools included in this study.

The results of this study suggest that communication linkages are not well established between vocational agriculture teachers and school principals in this state. The data suggest that there does not seem to be open, candid and clear communications between principals and teachers about the true essence of vocational agriculture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators must be informed about the educational goals and objectives of the programs under their supervision. Teachers should take the initiative to show in writing the program goals and objectives. Merely dispensing information will not ensure understanding and acceptance, but it is a beginning of the development of a systematic strategy of communication. Supervision is made easier because it is based on information about planned activities, programs or lessons.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION

This study underscores a key problem among educators. We do a good job of talking up our programs to each other, but do we really communicate with the key decision makers outside of our interest area? Decision making depends upon a complicated process of communication of information (Owens, 1970). The amount of information available for decision making has been shown to affect the quality of decisions made (Shaw and Penrod, 1962). The more information is generally known, the greater the chance it will be accepted and acted upon (Torrance, 1955).

Educational programs cannot operate in a shell. There must be a free flow of information. This study raises several concerns regarding the future of educational programs in schools where decision makers are vague as to what is really happening in these programs.

The results of this study indicate that teacher educators and the profession as a whole should devise communication and supervisory models for teachers to follow in establishing and maintaining communication linkages with school administrators.

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CHART #1

OBSERVATION OF INSTRUCTION

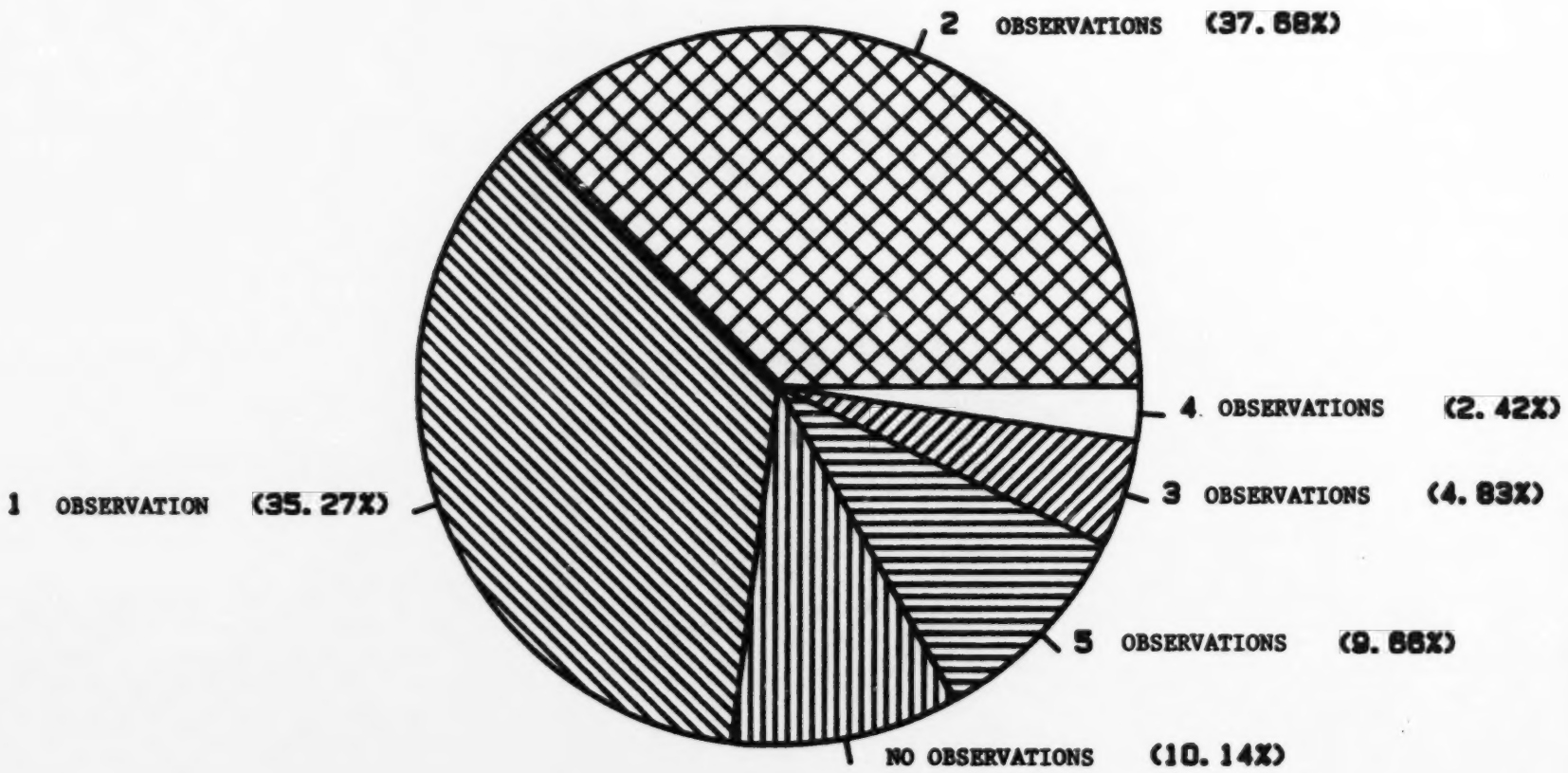

CHART #2

TEACHER/PRINCIPAL CONF.

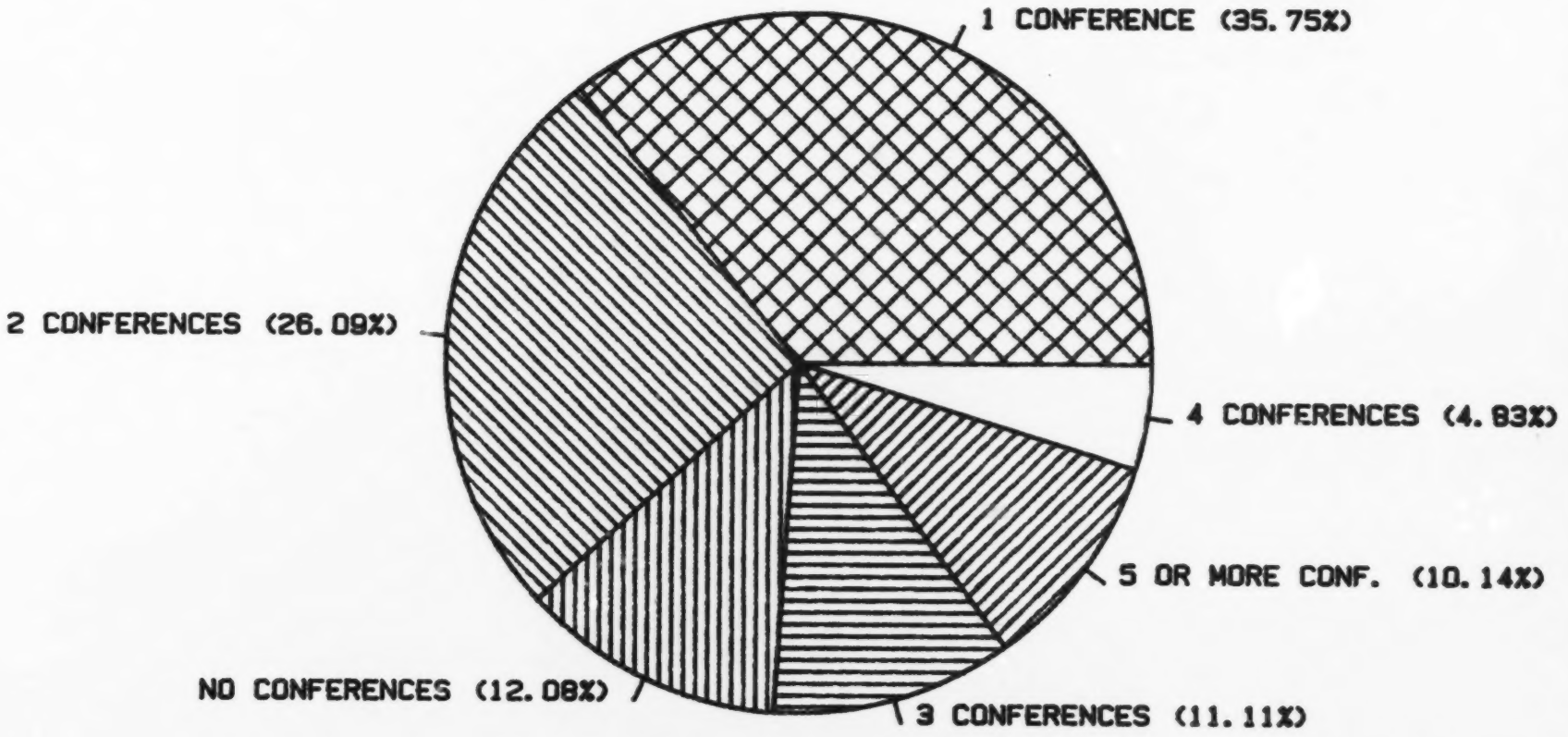

Table #1
Perceptions of High School Principals and Vocational Agriculture Teachers Regarding Openness and Approachability in Their Schools

Item	Principal (n=169) Mean / S.D.	Teacher (n=207) Mean / S.D.	T-value	Probability
To what extent does the principal freely talk to teachers about school matters?	3.88 / .88	3.43 / 1.09	4.35	.000
To what extent do the students talk to teachers about school matters?	3.47 / .76	3.89 / .69	-5.47	.000
To what extent is the principal's behavior seen as friendly and supportive?	4.16 / .81	3.74 / 1.05	4.21	.000
To what extent is the principal friendly and easily approached?	4.14 / .81	3.77 / 1.06	3.65	.000

Table #2
Perceptions of High School Principals and Vocational Agriculture Teachers Regarding Team Work

Item	Principal (n=169) Mean / S.D.	Teacher (n=207) Mean / S.D.	T-value	Probability
To what extent do you have confidence in teachers in your school?	3.98 / .93	3.82 / .69	1.99	.047
To what extent do teachers have confidence in the principal?	4.14 / .49	3.62 / 1.03	6.03	.000
To what extent do administrators, teachers and students work as a team in your school?	3.94 / .47	3.19 / .82	10.51	.000
To what extent does the principal express appreciation when teachers do a good job?	3.85 / .64	3.30 / 1.07	5.77	.000
To what extent does the administration use suggestions made by teachers?	3.69 / .74	3.11 / .94	6.47	.000

Table #3
Perceptions of High School Principals and Vocational Agriculture Teachers Regarding Problem-Solving in Their Schools

Item	Principal (n=169) Mean / S.D.	Teacher (n=207) Mean / S.D.	T-value	Probability
To what extent are teachers in your school helpful in solving school problems?	3.80 / .61	3.32 / .91	5.87	.000
To what extent is the communication open and candid between the principal and teachers in your school?	4.07 / .56	3.28 / 1.00	9.13	.000
To what extent does the principal offer new and useful approaches to problems?	3.26 / .81	2.94 / .95	3.41	.001
To what extent does the principal thoroughly explain various school procedures in your school?	3.60 / .81	3.50 / .95	1.16	.248

Table #4
Perceptions of High School Principals and Vocational Agriculture Teachers Regarding Communications and Support for Program Development

Item	Principal (n=169) Mean / S.D.	Teacher (n=207) Mean / S.D.	T-value	Probability
To what extent does the principal give useful information?	3.69 / .92	3.18 / .97	5.10	.000
To what extent does the principal let teachers do their work the way they think best?	3.89 / .85	4.20 / .85	-3.42	.001
To what extent do teachers and the principal discuss programs and course objectives?	3.47 / .77	3.11 / .95	3.95	.00